

Anti-Communism and the Hundreds of Millions of Victims of Capitalism

Capitalist production, when considered in isolation from the process of circulation and the excesses of competition, is very economical with the materialised labour objectified in commodities. Yet, more than any other mode of production, it squanders human lives, or living labour, and not only blood and flesh, but also nerve and brain. Indeed, it is only by dint of the most extravagant waste of individual development that the development of the human race is at all safeguarded and maintained in the epoch of history immediately preceding the conscious reorganisation of society.

Karl Marx, 1975 [1894], p. 92

A petulant upsurge in anti-communism is permeating the United States (US) and Canada, as well as countries in the European Union (EU). Its main truncheon is the simultaneously fictitious and slanderous claim that communism caused 100 million victims, a catchy slogan sensationalised through a 1997 propaganda volume titled *The Black Book of Communism* (henceforth *BBC*). It suits a broader China-bashing campaign, where the Communist Party of China is purposefully conflated with communism (see Smith 2020). This recent knee-jerk reaction may in part reflect ruling-class apprehensions at the rising popularity of genuinely socialist ideas. In this, it could be a positive sign. Regrettably, even some self-identifying socialists fall for the usual red baiting by strenuously denying any family resemblances with communism. Or, worse, they embrace and diffuse anti-communist rhetoric themselves.

These right- and left-wing attacks on communism nourish a return to anti-communism in the legal frameworks of liberal democracies and threaten the political prospects and personal safety of socialists of any stripe. Anti-communism should be as unacceptable and as vigorously challenged as the ignorant equation of anarchism with chaos and terrorism.

To avoid misunderstanding, the position taken here is that state socialism must be rigorously critiqued. It could even be rejected outright, provided practical alternatives are put into place and not just talked about. Anti-communism instead accomplishes little more than reinforcing capitalist ideology and hinders the advancement of any socialist project or politics. Secondly, it is not democracy that is at issue, but liberal democracy, one of the political manifestations of capitalism.

Short of organising a counter-movement, which is not feasible by means of an academic journal, there are important critiques that can be offered regarding flawed discourses of anti-communism currently circulating in the core capitalist countries. One of the most important ways that Left scholars can counteract efforts to discredit socialism is by citing actual evidence, especially when outlandish death tolls are bandied about regarding state socialism. It is beyond the scope of an editorial to appraise state socialism, but the least that can be said is that there have been multiple state-socialist forms, some repugnant and some inspiring. Among the former are examples like the USSR under the Stalin faction of the Bolsheviks, North Korea under the Kim dynasty, and Albania under Hoxha. Among the inspiring examples are Cuba, Vietnam, and Yugoslavia, where major strides were made from deplorable social conditions. In addition, all state-socialist systems changed substantially over time, for the most part eventually improving the lot of most workers with provisions like universal healthcare, guaranteed employment and housing, mass literacy and free education, and policies undermining patriarchal relations and racism. Those hard-

fought social gains have been severely eroded if not demolished in all formerly state-socialist countries. They are nonetheless historical achievements on which better socialist futures can be built, using critical understanding and historical hindsight to help pre-empt institutional degeneration, political repression, and general social harm.

These claims are certainly debatable, especially in a journal like this. Alternative or contrasting views and interpretations are and have been welcome, even if the present author has critiqued some of them. Criticism is fine when in solidarity with socialist revolutions, but it must be clearly articulated in ways that lend no credence to or support for efforts to discredit socialism.

That all such qualifications need be expressed at all testifies to a widespread and deeply held anti-communist prejudice that, when coming from the Left, ends up cementing a bourgeois ideology where Stalinism stands for all socialist currents and is the disciplining cudgel against co-operativism, anarcho-communism, Bolshevism, council communism, Maoism, autonomism, and any other socialist current. The bourgeois totalising reduction of socialism to Stalinism and the blanket rejection of state socialism by many leftists combine to dissemble the vast deadly horror that is capitalism, including its liberal democratic variant.

In this discussion I want to draw attention to the fact that, since the time of the Russian Revolution, capitalist institutions as a whole have caused close to 158 million deaths by waging war alone, with liberal democratic varieties of capitalism contributing at least 56 million of those fatalities. This monstrous impact, unprecedented in the history of humanity, doubtless reaches hundreds of millions more deaths when the centuries of genocides and slavery systems are considered and when murders in the home, at work, in prisons, and in the streets (including by police) are counted as well. Because studies on the level of morbidity associated with capitalist relations are scarce and limited, war-related deaths provide an arguably less assailable set of figures to oppose anti-communist libels.

Libel, Proclamations, and Laws against Communism

If it were just a matter of tackling the usual cheap red-baiting stunt, the farcical claims would be relatively simple to dismiss. The trouble is that the cheap stunt is widely accepted as fact in the US and several other liberal democracies, whose imperial reach is global. Quacks cannot be easily ignored or challenged when they are armed with the full weight of ruling institutions and military bases in more than a hundred countries. For decades now, in countries like Indonesia, Iran, Turkey, and the Ukraine, one can be arrested and sentenced to prison either for displaying communist symbols or spreading communist literature. It appears liberal democracies are trying to catch up.

Comparing the deadliness of social systems provides no moral compass and, politically, travels a road to nowhere. Murder is appalling and its systematic prevention must be a rock-solid foundation of any form of socialism. However, the “100 million victims” slur underpins newly emanated laws, resolutions, and proclamations targeting all communists. For good measure, the libel is inculcated through the press and buttressed by energetic support from capitalism’s intellectual lackeys. Anti-racists should have reason to be concerned, especially in the US. As Gerald Horne has shown, Black communists have been disproportionately persecuted (Horne 1986). Racially minoritised activists are always already targeted, regardless of political persuasion and community of provenance, as part of the moral absolutism characterising a settler colonial

system (Kovel 1997). It takes little effort to extend such libel-based legislation eventually to all socialists.

The US state and several of their recently acquired satellites (like the Hungarian and Polish states) promote the falsehood with great self-assured fanfare. Statues are erected and ceremonies observed in North America and Europe to commemorate the victims not of actual regimes, but of the very idea of communism. In the US, since 1993 (Public Law 103-199, Section 905), anti-communist memorialisation has even become a legal obligation that is to coincide with the Russian Revolution's anniversary. On 19th September 2019, the European Parliament passed a resolution that condemns communism, equating it with totalitarianism, including Nazism (European Parliament 2019). This tactic expanded on a similar 2009 resolution adopted on the heels of a 2008 proclamation of a day of remembrance for victims of "Stalinism" and Nazism (Black Ribbon Day ... perhaps black like the fascist blackshirts!). Support for such action came not just from the usual right-wing suspects, but also from the likes of the Green-European Free Alliance. It is part of a long campaign of smearing and silencing communists through patently false equivalences and at times brazen falsifications of history and sheer hypocrisy, given liberal democracies' historical abetting of Nazism and postwar shielding of most Nazis (Rockhill 2020). Such institutional anti-communist rhetoric and deceitful anniversaries are now congealed in the stony permanence of new public monuments.

On the institutional left outside outfits like the Green-European Free Alliance, self-styled socialists take pains to distance themselves from communism generally or from the kind of socialism represented in the Bolivarian government. The Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) actively partake of sanctions against the Venezuelan peoples and have no qualms with Black Ribbon Day. Part of the Sanders wing of the US Democratic Party make explicit linkages to white, capitalism-friendly Scandinavian social democracy, compared to "authoritarian" Cuba, even though, to his credit, Sanders praised the many achievements of the Cuban Revolution (and has been skewered for this in the capitalist press).

The messages, though, are often more insidious in that they are conveyed as tangential matters of fact. In a recent piece in *The Nation*, a major leftish US weekly, the claim of "genocide" for the 1930s famine in the Ukraine—a centrepiece of the 100 million victims charge—prefaces a criticism levelled at scientists who, allegedly like Lysenko, aided and abetted deadly policies aimed at the masses. An example would be the murderous negligence of the US Trump administration relative to the COVID19 pandemic (Gonsalves 2020). A gratuitous allusion to a false claim (the 100 million) is combined with specious analogy and tendentious comparison. Lysenkoism and Stalin have no analogue in pandemic denialism and Trump. US scientists' careerist genuflection to power bears no similarity to the outcomes of political struggles that ended up with a setback for genetics in the USSR and that undermined legitimate socialist resistance to eugenics in the 1930s (Roll-Hansen 2005). Meanwhile, the pretextual focus on the USSR under Stalin is the tendentious part of the analogy. It should raise concerns among leftists especially when it is dressed up with a trope much favoured among white nationalists. Unless the author is truly hapless, the reactionary politics are clear. It should not be too difficult to think first about the careerism-motivated fraudulence which pervades the sciences in the US—whether under the garbs of eugenics, Malthusian over-populationism, or environmental determinism—and which has been historically complicit in actual, documented genocides. Those are much more legitimate analogies one could make to current pandemic-related fraudster science at the service of the powerful. There is

evidently much work to be done within at least the mainstream or institutional left in refuting the “100 million victims” charge in all its manifestations.

Never mind that likely most of the victims would have been communists or other kinds of leftist anti-capitalists. Never mind the gross historical inaccuracies, unsupported assertions, and outright fictions pervading the *BBC*, on which the accusation is based (e.g. Ghodsee 2014; see also Cheng and Zhan 2018; Getty and Naumov 1999). A couple of *BBC*’s authors, hoisted by their own petard, admitted to the deceitful scholarship behind the outlandish claim not long after the book’s publication (Aronson 2003; Chemin 1997). This kind of libel is nothing new. It is part of the wider ideological arsenal deployed to legitimise and reinforce capitalist rule, especially in liberal democracies. A similarly untenable argument about the People’s Republic of China was made by an academic commissioned by the US Senate in the 1980s (Bernstein 1985).

Responding to Anti-Communist Defamation by Counting the Victims of Capitalist Wars

Typically, leftists have responded to the accusations levelled at “communism” by discussing the accuracy of the statistics cited and the logic of the arguments proposed. As Chomsky (2016) has ably argued, using findings from Amartya Sen, we can apply the same approach of the authors of *BBC* to

conclude that in India the democratic capitalist “experiment” since 1947 has caused more deaths than in the entire history of the “colossal, wholly failed ... experiment” of Communism everywhere since 1917: over 100 million deaths by 1979, tens of millions more since, in India alone.

This should put the matter to rest, but we could and should go even further and blame capitalists for all the deaths related to colonialism, imperialism, inter-capitalist wars, famines, and premature deaths due to industrial accidents, workplace negligence, and inadequate healthcare provision in all the countries outside the “Communist Bloc.” When doing this, the figure for the victims of capitalism doubtless ranges to levels that dwarf that mythical 100 million. The amount of death traceable to free-market policies is staggering, including such horrors as the wilful poisoning of local inhabitants at Minimata (Japan) and the Bhopal “accident” (India). Yet searching for and acquiring all the gruesome information would need years of dedicated study, alongside generous funding. The task would be as monumental as the sheer enormity of capitalist destructiveness (for a more thorough account based on several regional case studies, see Leech 2012).

Taking clues from Chomsky, I would like to give proponents of the “100 million victims” swindle another taste of their own methodology by examining just the war-related deaths caused by capitalism. I consider the period of 1914-1992, or from the beginning of World War I, to which the Russian Revolution is intimately tied, through the early 1990s, when hardly any “communist” country remained. Certainly, no socialist state has been engaged in “all-out war” since then. The data are mainly from Wikipedia (2020) and other sources for what is unreported in Wikipedia, like the anti-communist genocide in Indonesia (Bevins 2020). In not a few cases, the period of conflict extends beyond the historical intervals used. It was not possible to locate data adequate to suit a periodisation compatible with the comparative analysis carried out in this editorial. However, the total mortalities from the conflicts that cross the historical intervals chosen have little effect on the war death sums per social system (capitalism or “communism”). Such discrepancies have no bearing on the overall totals from 1914 through 2020, which is the main basis of the argument presented here.

Following anti-communists' preference for inflating figures (aside from laying blame on those who are historical victims of aggression), I will unabashedly and deliberately go for the highest mortality totals, even if only demonstratively, and be just as relaxed about the logic of culpability. Regardless, it will become obvious that even limiting the discussion to the much more easily retrievable data on war-related deaths (using even the more statistically restrictive estimates) gives plenty of reasons to deem capitalism as much deadlier than any nominal "communism," and by several orders of magnitude. This admittedly limited intellectual exercise has the merit of furnishing a gross underestimation of capitalism's deadliness. In other words, if just through warfare capitalism causes more death than any horror done through alleged "communism," it follows that capitalism must be the main focus of concern.

Aside from statistics on war-related deaths being more easily and widely available, focusing on war also makes sense because capitalism is intrinsically prone to warfare. It should not take too long to understand why. Violent conflict is eventually what happens when there are ruling economic groups constantly vying to grab resources and extract labour from oppressed classes. Capitalist ruling classes engage in ceaseless manoeuvring to outcompete each other and to outgun ruling economic groups somewhere else for the sake of endlessly accumulating economic power over the rest of society. War is a main way to gain the upper hand in the endless competition required for the endless accumulation of capital.

Capitalist Wars' Death Tolls

For a rapid comparison with the grand total of "100 million victims of communism" from *all* causes, one can start with World War I. About 23 million deaths were directly caused by mostly liberal democratic regimes at war with each other. Then, between seven and 12 million people died in the Russian Civil War, during 1917-1923 (Mawdsley 2009). This is entirely imputable to capitalist regimes since they intervened to crush the Revolution (the Czarists trying a military coup even earlier, arguably hastening the Revolution). Czarist forces (the White Army) tried in vain to re-impose the Romanov dictatorship while foreign governments, including the US, sent much military aid and invaded with tens of thousands of troops in support of White Army rogues. During that upheaval, a budding Turkish state's genocide (1919-1923) included at least a quarter million dead, largely Armenian. From the early 1920s through the 1930s, the Italian government murdered nearly 400,000 people in Ethiopia (1923-1936) and 80,000 in Cyrenaica (mainly in the 1930s). In South America, the 1932-1935 Chaco War (between the Bolivian and Paraguayan states) caused possibly 130,000 deaths. The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), entirely concocted and supported by capitalist regimes of all stripes (liberal to authoritarian), is associated with between a quarter of a million and a million deaths, with the wide uncertainty due to the suppression of information by the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975), supported throughout its existence by liberal democracies. On the other hand, 70 to 85 million people died in World War II, a war entirely again caused by capitalists and their state and fascist allies. Many major businesses (Fiat, Krupp, Volkswagen, Ford, IBM, etc.) also supported and profited from the war-imposing Fascist and Nazi regimes. And this is small wonder. Those dictatorships were based on defending private property, privatising public assets (against the general trend at the time), busting unions, and persecuting and murdering leftists of any sort. The resulting dividend for many capitalists was rising profits and greater market control (Bel 2006; De Grand 1995, 40-46).

It cannot be stressed enough that the vast majority of people killed in that conflagration lived in East Asia and Central and Eastern Europe. They were killed overwhelmingly by Japanese, German, and Italian imperialists and their local allies. Of course, the very democratic, freedom-

loving US managed to mass-murder 200,000 Japanese civilians in a couple of days with the atom bomb. Overall, the USSR and China alone suffered 26.6 and 20 million deaths, respectively. This is more than half of total World War II casualties, yet in liberal democracies one is constantly fed images and narratives of white Western Europeans being the main victims. Such is the obscenely obfuscated lens that people in free-market democracies are induced to develop since childhood.

Just starting on this macabre accounting and one already arrives at roughly 101 million victims of capitalism, taking the more restrictive geometric mean. The geometric mean is used here to make death estimates comparable, as they can vary considerably. It is about 120 million if one takes the loose approach to numbers favoured by anti-communists (Table 1). In other words, within just three decades (1914-1945) capitalism murdered more than all of forms of alleged killings by roughly 75 years of “communism.” As a conservative estimate, the mass killings by liberal democracies during World War I and the Russian Civil War alone account for more than 30 million deaths. Aside from all other kinds of fatalities generated by capitalists, this statistic excludes all the genocides a mere decade prior to World War I committed by liberal or free-market democracies like France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, and the US.

Table 1. War deaths attributable to capitalism, 1914-1945 (some of the wars are ongoing).

War	Dates	Maximum Reported	Geometric Mean*
World War I ^a	1914–1918	30,000,000	23,568,559
Russian Civil War ^a	1917–1922	9,000,000	6,708,204
Iraqi–Kurdish Conflict	1918+ ^b	320,100	210,784
Kurdish Rebellions in Turkey	1921+ ^b	100,000	100,000
Second Italo-Senussi War	1923–1932	40,000	40,000
Chaco War	1932–1935	130,000	100,000
Second Italo-Ethiopian War	1935–1936	278,350	278,350
Spanish Civil War	1936–1939	1,000,000	707,107
World War II	1939–1945	85,000,000	69,069,811
Totals		125,868,450	100,782,815
of which involving liberal democracies^a		39,000,000	30,276,763

^a Caused by or otherwise with direct involvement of liberal democracies

^b Ongoing conflict

*The geometric mean is an average used to make different data sets more comparable, in this case because of wide-ranging estimates per conflict. The geometric mean resembles the more widely used arithmetic average, except that values are multiplied instead of added and the root of the resulting product is taken according to the total number of cases.

Capitalist wars, of course, hardly end with World War II (Table 2). From 1946 to 1962 the French colonial regime was responsible for about 400,000 deaths in Southeast Asia, 35,000 in Madagascar, and about 750,000 in Algeria. An undeclared conflict in the aftermath of British colonial rule in 1947 caused between 200,000 and a million and half deaths in what became India and Pakistan (Brass 2003, 75). In 1948, with the pretext of squashing a revolt, the US puppet dictatorship in South Korea killed 60,000 people on Jeju Island or about a third of its inhabitants. Between 1948 and 1958, the war of “conservatives” on “liberals” in Colombia (“La Violencia”) caused about 200,000 deaths. The 1946-1949 persecution war on Greek leftists (not just communists) led to 158,000 deaths, with the direct support of Great Britain. Korea became the site of US incursion and belligerence, aided by the likes of Australia, Canada, France, New Zealand, and the UK, leading to a war with three million deaths. If a capitalist apologist wants to insist that the USSR and PRC are to blame, we can split the mortality two ways and point to one and a half million

deaths for which liberal democratic governments are responsible. During that same period, the 1950s, the British government murdered tens of thousands of Kikuyu people, mainly by means of concentration camps (Anderson 2005; Elkins 2005). Then there are ongoing wars, such as the Turkish state against Kurdish communities (since 1921, about 100,000 deaths), between India and Pakistan over Kashmir (since 1947 there have been 93,808 deaths), and in Nagaland (since 1954, about 34,000 dead). From 1955 to 1975, the US military intervention and political meddling in Vietnam caused more than three million deaths, plus another 100 thousand at least in Laos (worth always recalling: it is *the most bombed country in history*; Boland 2017) and 150,000 in Cambodia with carpet-bombing raids (enabling the Khmer Rouge take-over).

From 1960 to 1996, Guatemalan military dictators conducted a genocidal campaign against Mayan communities resulting in likely more than 200,000 deaths (Burt 2016; Snyder 2019). Between 1965 and 1966, the Indonesian military, backed by the US and their allies, murdered about a million people deemed communist or communist sympathisers, including by means of torture and executions in concentration camps (Bevins 2020). In Nigeria, nearly two million died in the 1967-1970 Biafra War. The war to establish independent Bangladesh (1971) left three million dead and the 1975-2000 Lebanese Civil War resulted in another 150,000 killed. The Indonesian military, with the backing of the US and their allies, invaded Papua in 1962 and killings have gone on unabated since then, producing so far 150,000 deaths (Célérier 2019). In 1975, the same military dictatorship, again supported by the US and their allies, invaded East Timor and, through 1999, carried out the extermination of approximately a fifth of the East Timorese people, about the same proportion of the Cambodian genocide (Jardine 1999; Sidell 1981).

More wars since the 1970s and through 1992 left millions more dead, with more than 140,000 people losing their lives in the numerous conflicts having 1,000-25,000 casualties. The above list of dozens of cases of mass slaughter together brings at least another 30.5 million war-related deaths (22.3 million by more restrictive standards) between 1945 and 1992. Without even counting the wars to establish and expand the Israeli state and the scores of wars producing less than 25,000 deaths, the contribution of liberal democracies to war-related deaths amounts to a conservative figure of close to 11 million people killed, or more than 15 million on less stringent accounting.

Table 2. War deaths attributable to capitalism, 1945-1992 (many of the wars extend beyond 1992).

War	Dates	Maximum Reported	Geometric Mean
First "Indochina War" ^a	1946–1954	400,000	400,000
Greek Civil War ^a	1946–1949	158,000	158,000
Partition of India	1946–1947	1,500,000	464,398 ^b
Malagasy Uprising ^a	1947–1948	89,000	35,000
Kashmir Conflict ^a	1947+ ^c	110,000	93,808
La Violencia (Colombia) ^a	1948–1958	194,700	193,697
Internal Conflicts in Myanmar	1948+ ^c	250,000	180,278
Arab–Israeli Wars	1948+ ^c	116,074	116,074
Indian Annexation of Hyderabad ^a	1948	242,212	84,116
Jeju Massacre	1948–1949	30,000	30,000
Korean War ^a	1950–1953	4,500,000	3,000,000
Algerian War ^a	1954–1962	1,500,000	724,569
Nagaland Conflict ^a	1954+ ^c	34,000	34,000
US War on Vietnam ^a	1955–1975	4,300,000	3,144,837

First Sudanese Civil War	1955–1972	500,000	500,000
Congo Crisis ^a	1960–1965	100,000	100,000
Guatemala Genocide ^a	1960+ ^d	200,000	200,000
Angolan War of Independence	1961–1974	102,991	92,452
North Yemen Civil War	1962–1970	200,000	141,421
Mozambican Independence War	1964–1974	88,500	74,965
Insurgency in Northeast India ^a	1964+ ^c	25,000	25,000
Colombian Civil War ^a	1964+ ^c	220,000	220,000
Indonesian Genocide ^a	1965–1966	1,000,000	1,000,000
Nigerian Civil War	1967–1970	3,000,000	1,732,051
Moro Conflict	1969+ ^d	120,000	120,000
Bangladesh Liberation War	1971	3,000,000	3,000,000
Ethiopian Civil War	1974–1991	1,500,000	866,025
East Timor Genocide	1975+ ^d	300,000	212,132
Angolan Civil War	1975+ ^d	504,158	504,158
Lebanese Civil War ^a	1975–1990	150,000	134,164
Insurgency in Laos ^a	1975+ ^d	100,000	100,000
Iran–Iraq War	1980–1988	1,100,000	564,041
Ugandan War	1981–1986	500,000	223,607
Second Sudanese Civil War	1983+ ^d	2,000,000	1,414,214
Sri Lankan Civil War	1983+ ^d	100,000	89,443
Somali Civil War	1986+ ^c	500,000	387,298
Lord's Resistance Army War	1987+ ^c	500,000	223,607
Nagorno-Karabakh War ^a	1988+ ^d	38,000	38,000
US War on Iraq (First Gulf War) ^a	1990–1991	40,456	32,091
Algerian Civil War	1991+ ^d	200,000	93,808
Bosnian War ^a	1991–1995	104,732	100,903
1991 Iraqi Coup Attempt ^a	1991	235,000	141,333
Wars with 1,000-25,000 deaths	multiple	146,902	146,902
Totals		31,999,725	22,246,796
of which involving liberal democracies^a		15,241,100	10,825,543

^a Caused by or otherwise with direct involvement of liberal democracies

^b Calculated from estimates reported in Brass (2003, 75; fn 7) and in “Partition of India” Wikipedia entry ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partition_of_India#Independence, population transfer, and violence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partition_of_India#Independence,_population_transfer,_and_violence); accessed 27 December 2020)

^c Ongoing conflict

^d Official conclusions to the conflicts extend beyond 1992. They date to 1996 for the Guatemala Genocide, 2019 for the Moro Conflict; 1999 for the East Timor Genocide; 2002 for the Angolan Civil War; 2007 for the Insurgency in Laos; 2005 for the Sudanese Civil War; 2009 for the Sri Lankan Civil War; 1994 for the Nagorno-Karabakh War (resumed and ended in 2020); 2002 for the Algerian Civil War

Comparing Capitalist and Allegedly “Communist” War Deaths and Beyond

All the wars that can be even remotely attributed to nominally socialist states (“communism”) or communist insurgents (Table 3) amount to about six million deaths (or 7.4 million, if one prefers looser estimates). This includes the estimated three million victims of the US- and PRC-supported Khmer Rouge carnage of 1975-1979, which was ended by the intervention of a most inconveniently *Communist* Party-led Vietnamese government. In other words, using conservative estimates, from 1945 until the “demise of communism” capitalist warfare, mostly in its liberal democratic garb (if one includes proxy warfare, as one must), killed *at least three times* as much as warfare from “totalitarian communism.” Moreover, liberal democratic governments alone murdered *at least twice* as much as “communist” governments during this same period.

Table 3. All war deaths attributable to alleged “communism” (several of the conflicts are ongoing).

War	Date	Maxima Reported	Geometric Mean
Hungarian Revolt	1956	3,722	3,722
Cuban Revolution	1959	5,000	5,000
Naxalite-Maoist insurgency	1967+ ^a	13,812	13,812
Colombian conflict	1964+ ^a	220,000	220,000
CPP-NPA-NDF rebellion	1969+ ^a	43,000	35,917
Ethiopian Civil War	1974–1991	1,500,000	866,025
Cambodia Genocide	1975–1979	3,000,000	3,000,000
Angolan Civil War	1975–2002	504,158	504,158
Kurdish–Turkish conflict	1978+ ^a	45,000	45,000
Soviet–Afghan War	1979–1989	2,000,000	1,095,445
Internal Conflict in Peru	1980+ ^a	70,000	70,000
Xinjiang Conflict	1960+ ^a	1,000	1,000
Totals		7,405,692	5,935,044

^a Ongoing conflict

To sum up (Table 4), the total 1914-1992 estimated number of victims of capitalist wars ends up being about 158 million if one goes with the looser estimate (about 123 million, more restrictively). Compare this not just with the hyper-inflated assertion of the “100 million victims of communism,” which includes every possible cause one could think up, not just warfare—it then becomes rather plain how much deadlier capitalism is. This estimate amounts to some 1.6-2 million people killed each year by capitalist wars. On the other hand, allegedly “communist”-inspired warfare killed a bit less than a hundred thousand per year (even when one exaggerates the figures). In fact, even when using the partly made-up “100 million victims of communism,” the figure of 1.3 million victims per year (100 million divided by 78 years) still results in fewer deaths than capitalist warfare. To reiterate, the purpose here is not to relativise the brutality of state socialist regimes, but to put them in a wider, comparative framework. The point is to counter anti-communist propaganda. Those who think liberal democracy is peaceful and the best of possible worlds may want to rethink their position. Liberal democracies’ warfare was five to six times as murderous as that from nominally “communist” polities.

Table 4. Comparison of war-related deaths between capitalism, its liberal democratic variant, and alleged “communism,” 1914-2020.

System	Dates	Years	Maximum Reported	Geometric Mean	War Deaths per Year	
					Maximum Reported	Geometric Mean
Capitalism	1914–1992	78	157,868,175	123,029,611	2,023,951	1,577,303
of which involving liberal democracies			54,241,100	30,276,763	500,000	388,164
“Communism”	1914–1992	78	7,405,692	5,935,044	94,945	76,090
Capitalism	1992–2020	28	11,282,808	8,002,219	402,957	285,794
of which involving liberal democracies			2,032,603	1,029,372	169,384	85,781

Since the collapse of “communism,” at least eight million more victims (and counting) have been added to the horrific toll of capitalist wars, about 285,000-400,000 per year, with liberal democracies accounting for more than a third (Tables 4 and 5). Within three decades after the “fall of communism,” capitalist warfare has already killed more people than the historical totals of war-related deaths related to “communism.” To repeat, all this excludes capitalism-caused deaths due to famines, industrial catastrophes, and much else that capitalist apologists prefer forgotten, under-reported, or never widely known.

Table 5. War deaths attributable to capitalism since 1992.

War	Dates	Maxima	Geometric mean
Sierra Leone Civil War	1991–2002	300,000	122,474
Burundian Civil War	1993–2005	300,000	300,000
Rwandan Genocide	1994	800,000	800,000
First Congo War	1996–1997	800,000	447,214
Second Congo War	1998–2003	5,400,000	3,674,235
Ituri Conflicts	1999–2003	60,000	60,000
US/NATO Terror War ^a	2001 ^b	1,260,000	585,423
US War on Afghanistan ^a	2001 ^b	61,603	53,949
US War on Iraq ^a	2003–2011	461,000	190,000
Darfur War	2003 ^b	300,000	300,000
Kivu Conflicts	2004 ^b	100,000	100,000
War in NW Pakistan	2004–2017	78,946	60,165
México “Drug War” ^a	2006 ^b	250,000	200,000
Boko Haram Insurgency	2009 ^b	51,567	51,567
Syrian Civil War	2011 ^b	570,000	570,000
Iraqi Civil War	2014–2017	200,000	197,500
Yemeni Civil War	2015 ^b	91,600	91,600
Wars with 1000-25000 deaths	multiple	198,092	198,092
Total since 1992		11,282,808	8,002,219
of which involving liberal democracies^a		2,032,603	1,029,372

^a Caused by or otherwise with direct involvement of liberal democracies

^b Ongoing conflict

But why not just cut through the rhetorical rubbish and use the death toll from the “Spanish” or “Kansas” flu (Barry 2004) as a retort to anti-communist demagogues? Using the same inflationary logic, that would already be about 100 million deaths right there, equalling the “100 million victims of communism” within a mere handful of years. After all, since communists are accused of causing mass mortality through their policies, we can just as easily accuse liberal democratic capitalists for their failure in preventing the spread of the flu and for negligence in matters of basic healthcare. In fact, negligence would be an understatement. It was planned capitalist conflagration and deliberate military policies that caused such a grim mortality figure. Even if one relies on more recently recalculated estimates that put total deaths at 50 million (Humphreys 2018), liberal democratic capitalism can be blamed unequivocally for, at a minimum, a period of historically unsurpassed yearly rates of mass death. In the current conjuncture of the COVID19 pandemic, it appears not much has changed in this respect within liberal democracies.

Resisting Anti-Communism to Build an Ecologically Sustainable, Classless, State-Free Future

If this is viewed as a wilfully tendentious numerical exercise, it is certainly much less so than to claim “100 million” dead from “communism”, as anti-communists allege. Unlike them, I am using

existing data in making this case. The much more studious and detailed rebutting and accounting from serious scholars (cited above) is commendable and should be essential reading especially for any supporter of liberal democracy, not just for self-respecting leftists. But when it comes to everyday discussions on politics, this scholarly tactic seems more effective at reaching other leftists and perhaps the relatively few out there who are not emotively attached to the capitalist status quo or to more extremely bigoted worldviews (e.g. Nazism) and who have time to investigate an issue and dedicate themselves to reasoning over it.

The problem is that the main organs of mass communication and the conditions and parameters of debate (e.g. unequal airtime or text space, sound-bite arguments favouring those upholding predominant ideologies, etc.) are firmly in the hands of those whose interests are to crush any form of socialism, including and especially communism. For socialists of any stripe (I include anarchists in this sense) to overcome this formidable barrier, nothing short of appropriating the means of media production (which also means diffusion) is a must. Under current circumstances, only a handful of state media in marginalised countries (e.g. Cuba, Venezuela) offer opportunities to reach majorities within a country, and with arguments debunking capitalist propaganda that reinforce what should be household truths about the horrors of capitalism and free-market (liberal) democracies. This is all the more reason leftists must cease and desist from reinforcing anti-communist propaganda, regardless of what they reckon of nominally socialist states like the USSR.

As stated above, there are many ways to undermine anti-communism. For one, attributing mass death to a set of principles or ideas (communism) is a form of fetishism that would exonerate those who perpetrated the horrors. After all, people from NATO countries have bombed others to death in the name of human rights not very long ago, as in Iraq and Yugoslavia. Calling the ideology of human rights responsible for those acts of mass murder seems rather inappropriate if one is interested in bringing murderers to account for the harm they have done.

Another option to counter anti-communism is by pointing out that communism, if one is serious about the substance of political philosophy, is about achieving a classless, state-free egalitarian society. This means that anti-communists want the opposite, a class, state-based, unequal society.

Yet another strategy can be to point out that the systems called “communist” were never communist. And, of course, they were not. They could not be. Since at least the 1860s, socialists, including anarchists, have struggled for the achievement of a classless and stateless social order. It has been called communism or anarchism, an ultimate objective involving widely diverging methods and with some differences in the substance of classlessness and statelessness. Nevertheless, a “communist state” in this historically contextualised sense is an oxymoron. Leftists of all people should be privy and sensitive to this basic aspect of socialist histories and to communist movements’ foundational motivations. This is besides the basic fact that governments headed by communist parties named their countries people’s democracies or socialist states, among other descriptors that laid no claims to any attainment of communism. If anything, it is those holding on to traditional conceptions of state socialism who have some explaining to do.

On the other hand, most people in countries like Australia, the US, Japan, and Canada, or within the EU, do claim the mantle of democracy. For that, they ought to take responsibility for all the deaths caused through their cherished system. Perhaps one day they will be made to do so or,

even better, they will finally see through their deeply erroneous ways. For the moment, this seems highly unlikely. For the sake of capital accumulation, disregard reigns among ruling classes over decades of hundreds of thousands of deaths annually from air pollution from fossil fuel combustion and the consequent intensifying climate catastrophe (Campbell-Lendrum and Prüss-Ustün 2019; Haines and Ebi 2019; WHO 2016). Capitalists and their political enforcers have lately been reaffirming the superior worth of their profits and political-economic power over people's health. About a million and a half have died of COVID-19 worldwide so far. This is directly imputable to businesses pushing profitability into tropical forests and exposing workers to zoonotic diseases while undermining public health and relentlessly eroding and pre-empting healthcare provisions almost everywhere (Wallace 2020).

These are examples of regular, normal capitalist relations, which include constant preparations for waging war to maintain or secure capital accumulation. Capitalism's war-related death toll so far exceeds 150 million since 1914. Wars waged by liberal democratic governments—the self-appointed models of rights and freedom—are alone responsible for at least 54 million deaths over the 1914-1992 period, and more than two million more since. There is yet no end in sight to free-market democracies' unfettered mass killing sprees. Yet these are gross underestimates of capitalism's unparalleled deadliness.

Leftists who object to communism will hardly put even an infinitesimal dent on the capitalist killing machine by reproducing anti-communist propaganda. It only helps intensify the threat of burgeoning anti-communist legislation and street actions against the left as a whole. It should go without saying that pointing to the much deadlier nature of capitalism, the most murderous system in the history of humanity, does not exempt a critical appraisal of socialist states. But critique of state socialism is mere sophistry when it contributes to reinforcing capitalist ideology. Let us then consciously reorganise and struggle for ecologically tenable classless egalitarian ends before capitalists obliterate most of humanity and other beings with another world conflagration or simply by conducting their regular business.

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